

# Civil Affairs gives needed assistance to Djiboutians

Story and Photos by Cpl. Adam C. Schnell

**MOULOUD, Djibouti** – Members of the 412<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion left Camp Lemonnier Feb. 28, with one mission in mind, to overcome initial apprehension and make a few new friends using a little medicine and a lot of care.

The battalion, part of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, was here to provide medical and veterinarian care to the residents and their livestock.

The goal is to increase stability in the region by cooperating with host villages.

The local villagers, who had never met the American soldiers before, were unsure about the team as they arrived in the rural area.

Even though local leaders worked closely with the civil affairs team to plan the Medical and Veterinarian Civic Action Programs, known as MEDCAPs and VETCAPs, villagers were initially more skeptical of the strangers. Apprehension about the Ameri-

can forces meant lower-than-expected participation the first day, said Sgt. 1<sup>st</sup> Class William J. Dickson, team sergeant for the Civic Action Team.

“You could tell that the people were a little hesitant at first,” said Dickson. “Once the word got out that we were helping people the first day, we were swamped the second day.”

With a watering well and ample open space, the location was chosen to better suit a large-scale VETCAP, with the support of a smaller medical program. The area was a place where people could go to get both themselves and their animals treated, said Army Col. John S. Allerding, preventive medicine officer for the battalion.

Once the trust was built, villagers were standing in line almost 75 people deep to receive medical treatment for them and their animals during the two-day long program.

On average, the second day brings more people to a MEDCAP or VETCAP. This is because the main means of communication within a rural community relies on word of mouth from villagers, local leaders said.

“Word of your presence here spreads very fast when people go back to their neighborhoods with American medicine in hand,” said Mousa Rakey, the Mouloud village chief.

While the number of people treated almost doubled on the second day to make a total of 282, the number of animals treated was still well under the expectations. This was mostly because of initial apprehension among owners of the livestock, village leaders said.

To help show that the soldiers would only do the animals good, Rakey brought his herd of goats and sheep to be treated.

“It was great when the village chief brought his animals to be treated by us,” said Army 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Kristy

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(Left) Much-needed medicine is given to a child by Lt. Cmdr. Douglas G. Hawk, a medical provider supporting the 412<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion, during a Medical Civic Action Program in Mouloud, Djibouti, Feb. 29. The two-day MEDCAP provided medicine to more than 280 people in the rural region of the Dikhil District. (Above) A mother watches her daughter take medicine given to them by medical doctors during a Medical Civic Action Program here Feb. 29.